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Portrait of Mr. Dulles

We doubt that it makes much sense for anybody to be greatly agitated by the latest literary portrait of Secretary Dulles as a statesman full of far-seeing derring-do. This particular picture has been drawn by John R. Beal, who covers the State Department for Time magazine. On the whole, in its unstinted admiration for the man, and in its rather unqualified style, it resembles—but in a larger form—what James Shepley wrote in Life last year about Mr. Dulles' so-called brink-of-war maneuvers, which that article hailed as things of dazzling brilliance.

Mr. Beal, like Mr. Shepley, has had a number of personal talks with the Secretary. As a result, although not "authorized," the biography he has written will be read around the world as a work that has come, so to speak, straight from the horse's mouth—more or less. And what will be particularly interesting abroad is the book's report on how Mr. Dulles, in "a moment of cold-war climax," decided to take "the mammoth calculated risk"—a risk followed by seizure of the Suez Canal and subsequent warfare—of abruptly withdrawing our country's offer to help Egypt build the projected high dam at Aswan. He did so, according to Mr. Beal, because "Nasser combined the right timing, the right geography, and the right order of magnitude for a truly major gambit" in the international power contest—a gambit designed to "expose the shallow character of Russia's foreign economic pretensions," especially its hinted readiness to extend tremendous amounts of nonmilitary aid to the Arab states.

Of course, judging from what Mr. Dulles said at his news conference yesterday, and judging also from the international political climate existing at the time of the decision to withdraw the Aswan offer, Mr. Beal's version of the facts may be viewed as oversimplified, or overdramatized. Nevertheless, since the Secretary seems to have a penchant for talking privately to admiring and enterprising Time-Life writers, overseas readers—in Cairo and elsewhere—will certainly feel inclined, and understandably so, to regard the new biography as an authentic summation of his life and works. Thus, having taken the calculated risk of conferring periodically (and apparently at some length) with a good and industrious reporter, Mr. Dulles must also reckon with the fact that he has taken the additional calculated risk of being misunderstood abroad at a time when it is much better to be understood.

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To say this is not to suggest (although the point is an arguable one) that the Secretary's Aswan decision was unsound or at least poorly executed. Still, regardless of such reservations, we sometimes think that Mr. Dulles would be well advised to leave it to future historians, rather than to contemporary magazine writers, to measure the nature and virtues of his statesmanship.

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